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The RED DEVILS

OUT OF THE BATTLE-FILLED HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR BLAZES THE STIRRING SAGA OF A GREAT REGIMENT. IN THOSE YEARS OF BITTER COMBAT IT WON PRIDE AND HONOUR SECOND TO NONE... *YET IT WAS THE YOUNGEST FIGHTING REGIMENT IN THE BRITISH ARMY!* HATED AND FEARED BY THE GERMANS, ITS MEN JUMPED INTO BATTLE FROM THE SKIES... FOR THEY WERE THE PARACHUTISTS WHO HAD EARNED FOR THEMSELVES THE NAME OF....

THE RED DEVILS!

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Chapter 1. TO THE LAST MAN

IN THE SILENCE, LIEUTENANT DICK NORTON'S GAZE SEARCHED THE GRIM-SET FACES ABOUT HIM. THE MEN OF HIS PLATOON HAD HEARD THAT MESSAGE... AND KNEW WHAT IT MEANT...
WE'RE THE FORWARD TROOPS AND THE JAPS OUTNUMBER US BY FIVE TO ONE! WE'VE GOT TO HOLD THEM BACK UNTIL OUR MAIN POSITIONS ARE READY BEHIND US.

LONG MINUTES TIGHTENED NERVES ALREADY WORN WITH FATIGUE AND MONTHS OF FIGHTING ON THE WITHDRAWAL. THEN A LOW VOICE GRATED HARSHLY...
HERE HE COMES... THE LEADING SCOUT OF THE JAPS. THE REST OF 'EM SHOULD BE RIGHT BEHIND HIM, SIR!
AND HE'S GOING TO LEAD 'EM RIGHT UP TO US BEFORE WE OPEN FIRE! KEEP DEAD QUIET!

THEN THE TREES BECAME ALIVE WITH MOVEMENT AND A WIDESPREAD WAVE OF JAPANESE TROOPS FLOODED SLOWLY UP THE RIDGE SLOPE. THEY WERE BARELY A HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE TOP. WHEN SUDDENLY...
RAPID FIRE!

IN THOSE FIRST DEVASTATING SECONDS, AN INVISIBLE SCYTHE OF FLYING LEAD CUT THE LEADING JAPANESE DOWN LIKE CORN. THEN THE REST WERE SCUTTLING DESPERATELY FOR COVER...
THAT HIT 'EM WHERE IT HURT, SIR!
WE PLAYED THE ONLY ACE WE HAD... SURPRISE! NOW IT'S OUR TURN TO TAKE IT!

THE BRITISH TROOPS DID NOT HAVE LONG TO WAIT. OVER THE CRACKLING RIFLE FIRE A HIGH-PITCHED WHINE SUDDENLY GREW IN THE AIR...
HEADS DOWN! MORTAR FIRE!

A PATTERN OF SEARING ORANGE FLASHES MUSHROOMED AROUND THE BRITISH POSITION WITH VICIOUS CRUMPS... AND SCREAMING STEEL SPLINTERS SLICED MENACINGLY OVER THE RIDGE TOP...

AGAIN THE EARTH SHUDDERED AS IT WAS TORN APART BY A NEW CLUSTER OF MORTAR BOMBS.
THEY'RE GOING TO CHARGE! GET READY FOR 'EM!

IN A RAGGED LINE THE JAPS SWEPT TOWARDS THE RIDGE TOP...AND CRUMPLED AS THEY MET A WALL OF FLAMING GUN MUZZLES.
RUNNER... URGENT MESSAGE TO THE MORTARS TO PUT HEAVY BARRAGE ON THE ACCURSED ENGLISH!

BUT THE BRITISH POSITION SOMEHOW SURVIVED THE FURY OF THAT MORTAR BOMBARDMENT... AND THE NEXT... THEN ANOTHER. AGAIN AND AGAIN THE JAPANESE CHARGED...ONLY TO BE HURLED BACK. BUT THE PRICE WAS HEAVY...
WE'RE PRACTICALLY SURROUNDED, SIR! NOW THEY'VE GOT A SNIPER UP IN THOSE TREES. AND FIVE OF US LEFT AGAINST THE WHOLE FLIPPING JAP ARMY!
OPERATOR...GET H.Q. TELL THEM WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF AMMUNITION AND REQUEST PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW!

THE WIRELESS OPERATOR SPOKE INTO THE MICROPHONE...TURNED HIS HEAD TO LISTEN ...AND BY A HAIRSBREADTH A SNIPER'S BULLET FANNED HIS FACE... AND SMASHED INTO THE RADIO SET!
SORRY, SIR... ALL I GOT FROM H.Q. WAS "DO NOT..." AND THEN WHAM!
ALMOST CERTAIN TO HAVE MEANT NOT TO WITHDRAW! SO WE'VE GOT TO STAY ... UNTIL THE END!

IN THE MANNER SO TYPICAL OF BRAVE MEN, NO MORE WORDS WERE NEEDED. SILENTLY THEY WAITED FOR WHAT HAD TO COME ... THE NEXT ATTACK ... AND THE LAST!
COME AND GET ME, YOU APES... AND PAY FOR THE CHANCE!
AAAGH!

THE DEADLY CHATTER OF THE TOMMY GUN STUTTERED TO A FINAL END AS THE MAGAZINE EMPTIED. BUT STILL DICK NORTON FOUGHT ON... ALONE... MAGNIFICENT IN HIS UNDYING COURAGE, SURROUNDED BY HIS FALLEN FOES...

THEN, TWENTY YARDS FROM THAT GLORIOUSLY BATTLING FIGURE, A JAPANESE LIFTED HIS RIFLE AND FIRED. PAIN EXPLODED IN DICK NORTON'S HEAD, FLOODING THROUGH HIM... AND HE PITCHED FORWARD INTO A YAWNING CAVERN OF BLACKNESS...

DIE, ENGLISHMAN... AS WILL ALL WHO DEFY THE MIGHT OF THE EMPIRE OF NIPPON!

HEEDLESS OF THEIR HEAVY LOSSES, THE JAPANESE SPEARHEAD SWEPT ON. HOURS LATER... *INCREDIBLY... A FAINT WHISPERING SIGH ROSE FROM THAT SHATTERED RIDGE TOP.*

WOULDN'T... BELIEVE... I'M... STILL... ALIVE... IF... I... DIDN'T... HAVE... THIS... HAMMER... IN... MY... HEAD!

WITH THE WORLD SPINNING ABOUT HIM, AND HIS HEART BEATS THUNDERING IN HIS EARS, DICK STAGGERED TO HIS FEET...

BULLET MUST HAVE CREASED ME... WONDER IS, THE JAPS DIDN'T MAKE SURE I'D HAD IT!

AND SO, STUMBLING AND FALLING, FEEBLY DRAGGING HIMSELF UP AGAIN, DICK NORTON REACHED THE JUNGLE'S EDGE. IN A MOMENT HE WAS LOST IN THE STEAMING MURK OF ITS DEPTHS... AND FROM THE SIGHT OF ANY LIVING MAN.
NOW OUR STORY MUST MOVE IN DISTANCE AND TIME...TO THE BORDERS OF INDIA A HUNDRED MILES WEST... AND A HUNDRED DAYS LATER...

SERGEANT BILL REED'S EYES RAKED THE JUNGLE'S EDGE FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME THAT DAY...SUDDENLY THEY WIDENED...
GREAT GUNS... A WHITE MAN! AND THAT'S THE REMAINS OF A BRITISH UNIFORM HE'S WEARING!

AS THE STAGGERING FIGURE LURCHED FORWARD UNSTEADILY, A DRAGGING FOOT TRIPPED...
YOU'RE ALL RIGHT NOW, CHUM...I'VE GOT YOU.
MUST... TELL...COLONEL ...ENEMY... BROKE... THROUGH...

THE FAINT VOICE WITHERED AS BILL LOWERED THE FRAIL FORM TO THE GROUND. THEN, BESIDE HIM THE OFFICER GASPED IN DISBELIEF...
IT'S...IT'S LIKE SEEING A GHOST! SERGEANT...THIS MAN IS LIEUTENANT NORTON...YOU REMEMBER HE WAS REPORTED AS BEING WIPED OUT WITH HIS PLATOON THREE MONTHS AGO!

A NERVE FLICKERED AND JUMPED IN THE SERGEANT'S HARD JAW AS HE STARED DOWN AT THE PITIABLE FACE OF DICK NORTON . . .
I'LL NEVER FORGET THAT MASSACRE... OR THAT MY BROTHER WAS THE PLATOON CORPORAL!
STRETCHER PARTY... AT THE DOUBLE!

A FEW MINUTES LATER, TWO FIRST AID MEN CAREFULLY CARRIED THE LADEN STRETCHER TO THE UNIT MEDICAL OFFICER'S POST...
IT'S A MIRACLE HOW HE SURVIVED THREE MONTHS IN THE HEART OF THAT BLACK JUNGLE!
YES... AND HOW WAS IT HE WASN'T KILLED WITH MY BROTHER? SOMEHOW HE GOT BACK HIMSELF ...WHY COULDN'T HE HAVE SAVED THE OTHERS, TOO?

FOR THREE DAYS DICK LAY IN A COMA, WATCHED UNCEASINGLY BY A MEDICAL ORDERLY. WHEN FINALLY HIS EYES OPENED, THE BURNING FIRE OF FEVER HAD LEFT HIM...
HOW ARE YOU FEELING, OLD MAN?
I JUST WANT TO SLEEP FOR A MONTH, DOC.
YOU TRY AND DO JUST THAT. I'LL BE BACK LATER!

OUTSIDE THE TENT, THE M.O. SHOOK HIS HEAD AS IF IN DESPAIR... AND THEN WENT OFF TO FIND THE UNIT'S ADJUTANT.
AFTER WHAT THAT YOUNGSTER WENT THROUGH, IT BEATS ME HOW HE'S STILL ALIVE. AND I'LL BET MY BEST STETHOSCOPE HE'LL NEVER BE FIT FOR ACTIVE DUTY AGAIN!
RIGHT, DOC...WE'LL HAVE HIM EVACUATED TO DELHI HOSPITAL BY THE NEXT CONVOY GOING BACK!

STRANGELY ENOUGH HE DOESN'T REMEMBER HIS BATTLE WITH THE JAPS. IT'S A SORT OF WOUND OF THE MIND THAT IS STILL TO HEAL!
DOC... IF NORTON HADN'T HELD THOSE JAPS OFF, THE WHOLE BATTALION WOULD HAVE CAUGHT IT! BUT WHY DIDN'T HE OBEY OUR ORDER...DO NOT HOLD POSITION ANY LONGER! NOW IT SEEMS WE'LL NEVER KNOW!

Chapter 2. PARACHUTE SCHOOL

DICK STARED UNBELIEVINGLY AT THE SENIOR MEDICAL OFFICER . . .

YOU MEAN . . . I'M FINISHED WITH THE ARMY?

NO . . . IT'S NOT QUITE LIKE THAT! PHYSICALLY YOU WILL RECOVER COMPLETELY . . . BUT WE ARE SURE THAT AFTER YOUR ORDEAL, *YOUR NERVES WILL NEVER STAND UP TO BATTLE AGAIN!* YOU ARE MEDICALLY DOWN GRADED TO NON-COMBATANT!

STRICKEN BY THAT FATEFUL DECISION, DICK STUMBLED FROM THE OFFICE AND IN THE DEPTHS OF DESPAIR REPORTED TO THE HOSPITAL ORDERLY ROOM . . .

WE'VE BEEN ON TO G.H.Q. FAR EAST, AND FIXED YOUR POSTING. IT'S TO THE PARACHUTE SCHOOL NEAR MANCHESTER AS THE OFFICER IN CHARGE OF TRAINING STORES.

SO WHILE EVERYONE ELSE THERE IS AIRBORNE... I'LL BE CHAIRBORNE!
YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR LUCK, LADDIE... BACK TO DEAR OLD ENGLAND... AND YOUR THIRD PIP GOES WITH THE JOB, CAPTAIN NORTON!

ON THE TROOPSHIP BOUND FOR BELEAGUERED BRITAIN, O HER OFFICERS TRIED TO BE FRIENDLY WITH DICK BUT HIS BLEAK MISERY WAS AN IMPENETRABLE BARRIER...
ONLY TEN DAYS AND WE'LL BE HOME ...WONDERFUL, EH, NORTON?
I SUPPOSE SO...IF THAT'S WHERE YOU WANT TO BE!

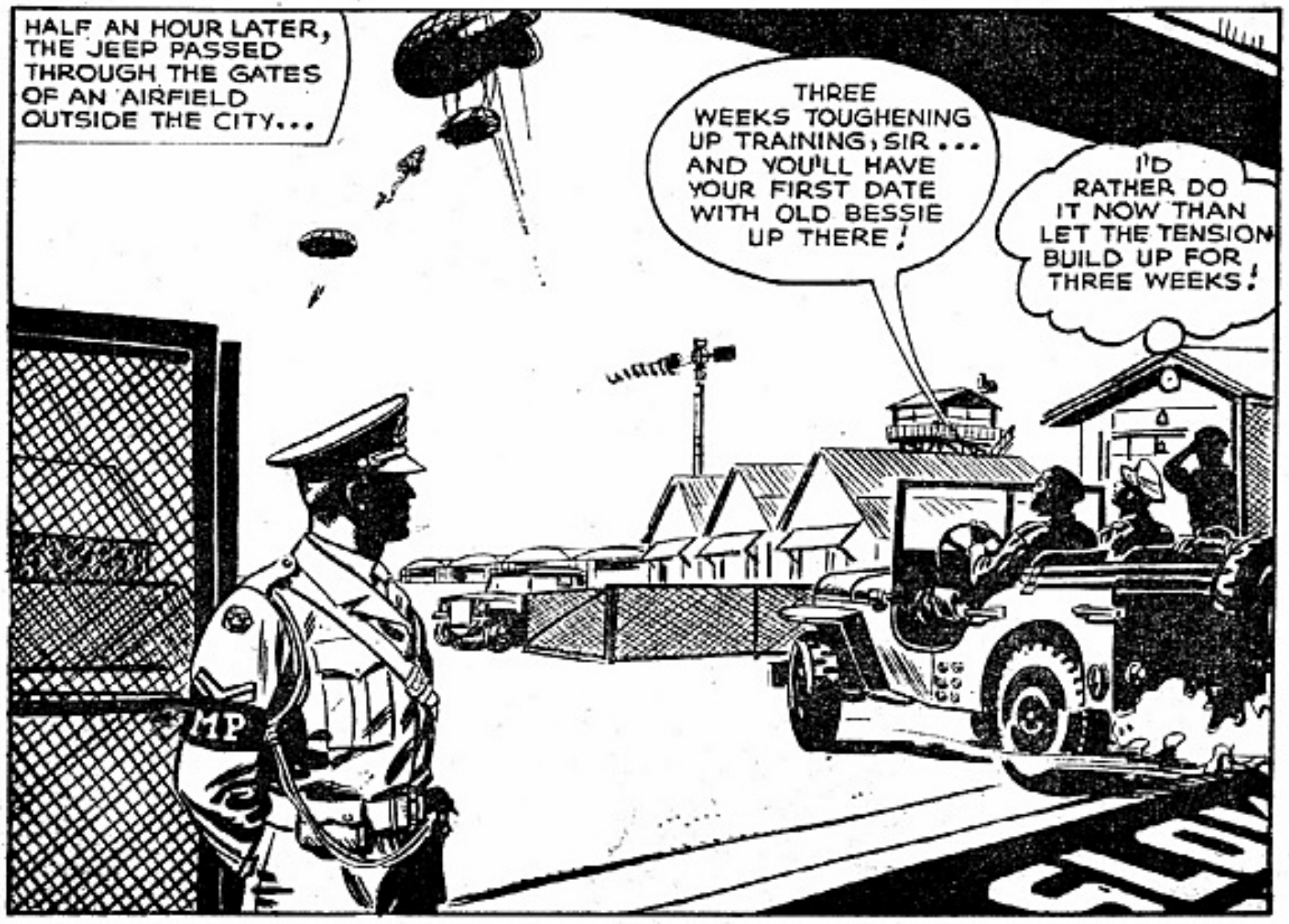
AFTER THAT THEY LEFT HIM ALONE... AND FOUND THEIR OWN REASONS FOR HIS COLDNESS...
SURLY BRUTE THAT NORTON... IS HE BEING SENT HOME IN DISGRACE?
NOTHING LIKE THAT, OLD BOY! HE TOOK A REAL BEATING IN THE JUNGLE ... LOST HIS NERVE... ABSOLUTELY USELESS AS A FIGHTING TYPE NOW!

UNNOTICED, DICK HEARD EVERY WORD... AND EACH ONE WAS A HAMMER BLOW DRIVING HIM DEEPER INTO THE GLOOM OF DEJECTION...
MAYBE THEY'RE RIGHT! EVERY TIME I TRY TO REMEMBER THOSE DAYS IN THE JUNGLE, MY MIND JUST WON'T LET ME... AND THE THOUGHT OF PAIN AND DANGER TURNS ME WEAK AND FAINT!

SO THE DAYS WHICH FOLLOWED BECAME A KIND OF PRIVATE NIGHTMARE FOR DICK. AT LIVERPOOL HE LEFT THE SHIP AND TRAVELLED BY TRAIN TO MANCHESTER ...
CAPTAIN NORTON? I'M FROM THE SCHOOL, SENT TO MEET YOU. I'VE GOT A JEEP... AS I UNDERSTOOD YOU WERE BRINGING SOME SORT OF STORES!
GOOD MORNING, SERGEANT. STORES? ALL I'VE GOT IS MY OWN LUGGAGE ...THIS SUITCASE!

THE SERGEANT CHEERFULLY GRINNED AT DICK... AND THE YOUNG OFFICER STOOD STATUE STILL, FROZEN WITH AMAZEMENT!
WE ONLY GOT NEWS OF YOUR POSTING TO US FOR TRAINING YESTERDAY, SIR.. LUCKILY FOR YOU, BECAUSE WE'RE JUST STARTING A NEW PARACHUTING COURSE TOMORROW!
EXIT
STORES... TRAINING... PARACHUTING... WHAT'S GONE WRONG HERE?

PUZZLED, DICK CLIMBED INTO THE JEEP... AND THEN UNDERSTANDING FLARED LIKE A BRIGHT NEW FLAME IN HIS HEAVY HEART...
BY GLORY... THE SIGNALS FROM INDIA MUST HAVE BECOME MESSED UP! OFFICIALLY I'M HERE FOR PARACHUTE TRAINING... AND NOT TO LOOK AFTER TRAINING STORES! AND IF I BACK OUT OF THIS, IT MEANS I AM FINISHED. BUT I'M GOING TO DO IT... TO PROVE TO MYSELF I'VE STILL GOT SOME NERVE LEFT. I'VE GOT TO CONQUER MY FEAR!


HALF AN HOUR LATER, THE JEEP PASSED THROUGH THE GATES OF AN AIRFIELD OUTSIDE THE CITY...
THREE WEEKS TOUGHENING UP TRAINING, SIR... AND YOU'LL HAVE YOUR FIRST DATE WITH OLD BESSIE UP THERE!
I'D RATHER DO IT NOW THAN LET THE TENSION BUILD UP FOR THREE WEEKS!
MP

BUT DICK FOUND HE HAD LITTLE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE SUPREME TEST OF COURAGE WHICH WAS TO COME. EVERY HOUR OF THE DAY WAS FILLED WITH MUSCLE WRACKING WORK.

GET THOSE LOGS MOVING! FASTER... FASTER! BY THE TIME I'VE FINISHED WITH YOU, YOU'LL BE THROWING THEM TO EACH OTHER!

...PARACHUTE LANDING DRILL...

GET OUT OF YOUR HARNESS, SIR, BEFORE YOUR HANDS AND FACE ARE SKINNED RAW!

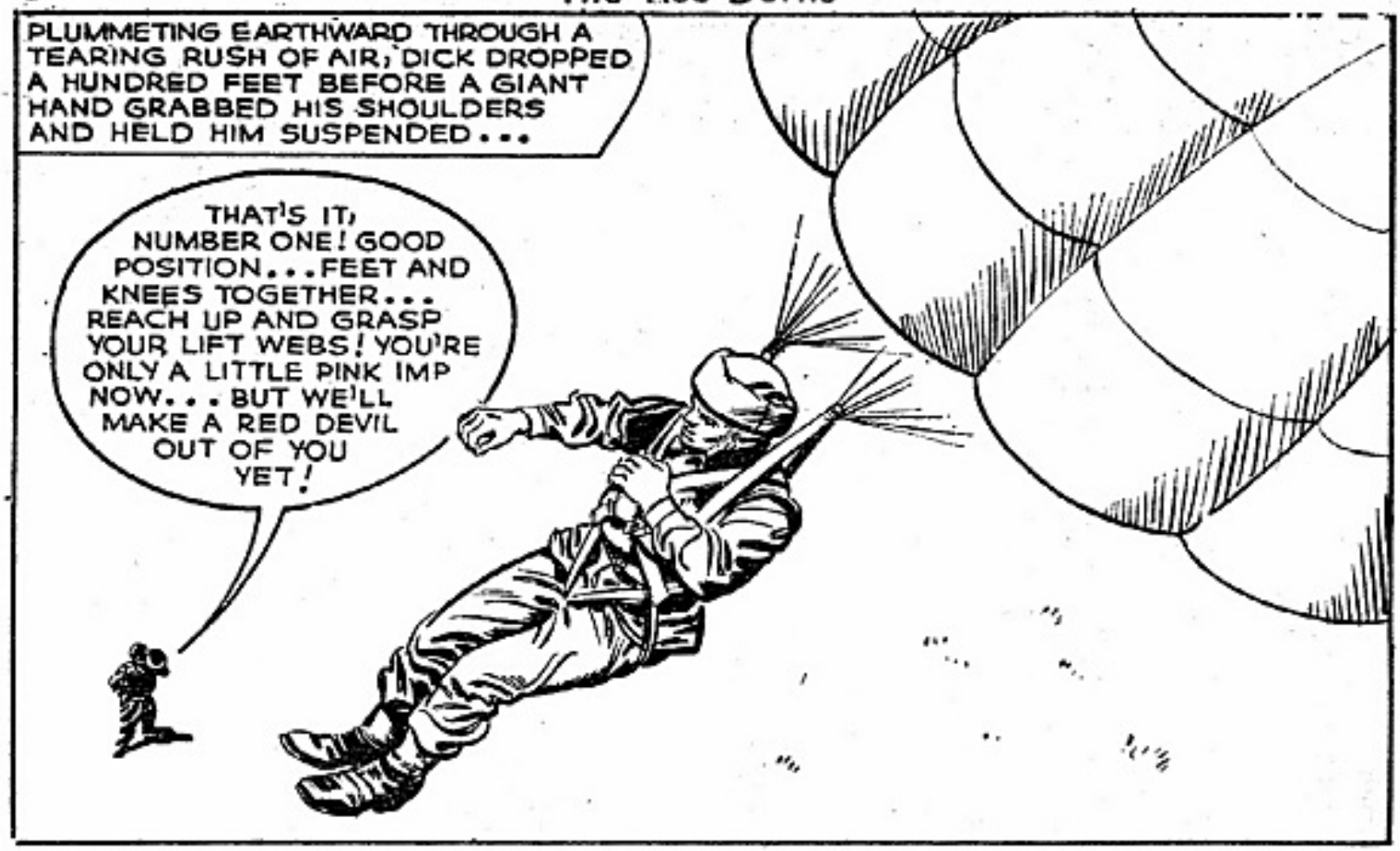
THEY WERE TWENTY ONE DAYS OF GRINDING PHYSICAL EFFORT... BUILDING THE RECRUITS INTO SUPERBLY FIT AND DISCIPLINED FIGHTERS. EVERY ORDER HAD TO BE OBEYED INSTANTLY.
GREEN ON, GO!

THEN AT LAST THE ORDER CAME TO DRAW 'LIVE' PARACHUTES... "BESSIE" WAS WAITING!
YOU'RE NUMBER ONE, CAPTAIN NORTON! LAST IN... FIRST OUT!
WIND SPEED FOURTEEN M.P.H., SIR... JUST UNDER THE SAFETY LIMIT. THEY'LL PROBABLY LAND ALL OVER THE DROPPING ZONE!

SLOWLY THE MOTOR WINCH LET THE MASSIVE BALLOON RISE, CARRYING ITS SWAYING CAGE FULL OF DRY-LIPPED, SILENT MEN.
EIGHT HUNDRED FEET, CHAPS! WHAT COMES UP MUST GO DOWN... AND THAT MEANS YOU! NUMBER ONE, STAND IN THE DOOR!

DICK FELT AS IF IT WERE SOMEONE ELSE WHO STOOD THERE IN THE OPEN DOORWAY, FORCING HIS EYES TO GAZE DOWN THROUGH HUNDREDS OF FEET OF NOTHING...
NICE CLEAN EXIT NOW, SIR... NO HURRY! GREEN ON... GO!

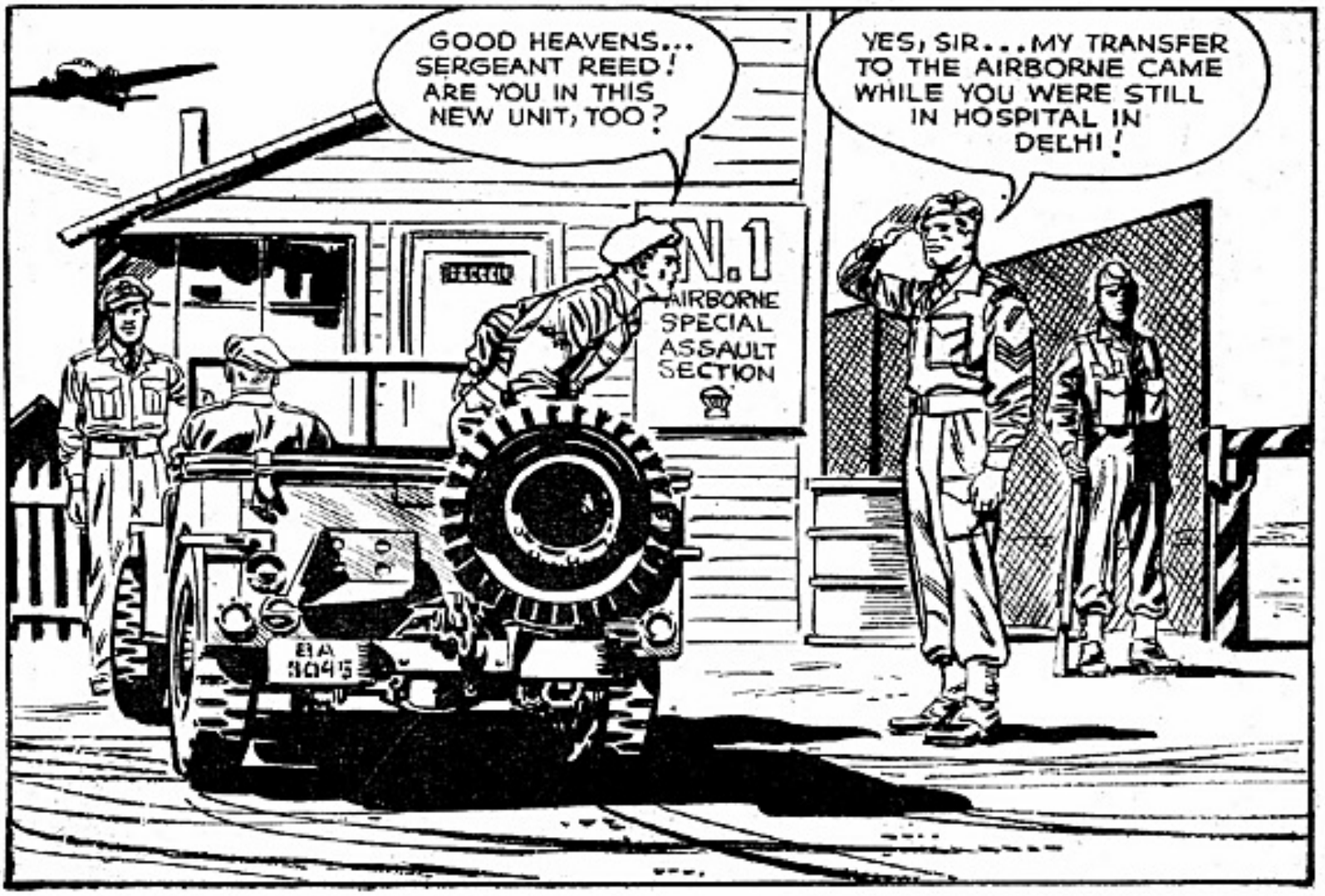
INSTINCTIVE REACTION TO THE COMMAND SENT DICK HURTLING FORWARD... AND DOWN!


PLUMMETING EARTHWARD THROUGH A TEARING RUSH OF AIR, DICK DROPPED A HUNDRED FEET BEFORE A GIANT HAND GRABBED HIS SHOULDERS AND HELD HIM SUSPENDED...
THAT'S IT, NUMBER ONE! GOOD POSITION...FEET AND KNEES TOGETHER... REACH UP AND GRASP YOUR LIFT WEBS! YOU'RE ONLY A LITTLE PINK IMP NOW... BUT WE'LL MAKE A RED DEVIL OUT OF YOU YET!

THE CALM MEASURED VOICE FROM THE LOUDSPEAKER GUIDED DICK DOWN TO EARTH... WHICH AT FIRST SEEMED SO FAR AWAY... THEN SUDDENLY... THUMP!
BUT DICK DID NOT FEEL THE BONE JARRING FALL...HIS WHOLE BEING WAS DROWNED IN A SEA OF EXULTATION! HE HAD DONE IT! HE HAD WON THE BATTLE AGAINST FEAR!

AFTER THAT CAME ONE MORE JUMP FROM A BALLOON...AND THEN SIX FROM A DAKOTA AIRCRAFT. IN THE ONE HUNDRED MILES PER HOUR SLIPSTREAM MEN WERE THROWN THROUGH THE AIR LIKE DOLLS...

THEN CAME THE PROUDEST DAY IN DICK'S LIFE... THE PRESENTATION OF HIS PARACHUTE WINGS...
FIRST-CLASS EFFORT, CAPTAIN NORTON. YOU'LL GET YOUR INSTRUCTIONS TO JOIN A PARACHUTE UNIT FROM THE SCHOOL ADJUTANT!
THANK YOU, SIR!
IT SEEMED THAT GOOD FORTUNE NOW FOLLOWED DICK... FOR HE FOUND THAT HE WAS POSTED TO A NEW SPECIAL AIRBORNE ASSAULT SECTION FORMING IN THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND ...AND THAT HE WAS TO COMMAND IT! TWO DAYS LATER HE REACHED THE UNIT CAMP... AND FOUND THAT FATE HAD YET ANOTHER SURPRISE FOR HIM....


GOOD HEAVENS... SERGEANT REED! ARE YOU IN THIS NEW UNIT, TOO?
YES, SIR... MY TRANSFER TO THE AIRBORNE CAME WHILE YOU WERE STILL IN HOSPITAL IN DELHI!
No 1 AIRBORNE SPECIAL ASSAULT SECTION

DICK MISSED THE BITTERNESS WHICH SHADED THE SERGEANT'S RUGGED FEATURES...
THERE ARE TWENTY FIVE OF US IN THE OUTFIT, SIR... SO FAR I'VE BEEN IN CHARGE BUT I'LL HAND OVER TO YOU NOW. MOST URGENT THING IS THE CONFERENCE CALLED AT PARACHUTE BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS FOR THREE O'CLOCK THIS AFTERNOON! SOMETHING BIG IS IN THE WIND, SIR!
IT'S ONE THIRTY ALREADY... I'D BETTER MAKE TRACKS FOR IT NOW!

WHEN DICK'S JEEP RACED AWAY, SERGEANT BILL REED'S QUESTIONING GAZE FOLLOWED IT THROUGH THE GATES...
SO THAT WAS THE NEW O.C., EH, SARGE... AND YOU KNEW HIM OUT IN BURMA, DIDN'T YOU? WHAT'S HE LIKE IN ACTION?
I KNEW HIM... BUT I NEVER FOUGHT BESIDE HIM SO I CAN'T SAY!
BUT HE LOST MY BROTHER AND ALL HIS MEN IN BATTLE... AND CAME BACK ALONE AND MAYBE WE'LL GET THE SAME TREATMENT!

WHEN DICK RETURNED TO THE CAMP SOME HOURS AFTERWARDS, HE SOON CONFIRMED THE RUMOURS OF "SOMETHING BIG" COMING OFF ...

SO FAR I'M A STRANGER TO YOU ALL... *BUT IT WON'T BE FOR LONG!* COMRADESHIP IS FORGED IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE... ***AND WE'LL BE IN IT UP TO OUR NECKS SOON!***

TENSION GREW AS DICK'S CALM UNHURRIED VOICE WENT ON ....

LET'S GET DOWN TO IT. THE SECOND BRITISH ARMY ARE ON THE RIVER MEUSE AND THE ESCAUT CANAL. TO SPEED UP ITS ADVANCE INTO THE HEART OF GERMANY THE ALLIED FIRST AIRBORNE CORPS ARE GOING TO CLEAR THE WAY FOR THEM!

ON SECOND ARMY'S ASSAULT ROUTE ARE FOUR BRIDGES WHICH HAVE TO BE CAPTURED. THE AMERICAN AIRBORNE DIVISIONS ARE TACKLING NUMBER ONE, TWO AND THREE... AND OUR FIRST AIRBORNE DIVISION IS GOING FOR NUMBER FOUR THE BRIDGE AT ARNHEM!
Arnhem
4
RHINE
3
WAAL
2
Nijmegen
MAAS
CANAL
Grave
1
SIEGFRIED

OUR TASK IS TO CAPTURE THE MAIN CROSS ROADS LEADING INTO ARNHEM... AND BEAT OFF JERRY RE-INFORCEMENTS TRYING TO GET AT OUR MAIN FORCE ATTACKING THE BRIDGE! WE MUST NOT FAIL!

THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WERE FULL OF VITAL PREPARATION FOR THE GREAT AIRBORNE OPERATION. THE CAMP WAS SEALED, WITH NO ENTRY OR EXIT, FOR SECURITY REASONS...
COR, THEY CALL THIS SLUDGE TEA! WHAT I WOULDN'T GIVE FOR A NICE HOT CUPPA REAL CHAR DOWN AT THAT CAFE IN THE VILLAGE!
CAMP C
YOU JUST TRY AND GET OUT FOR IT, SMUDGER... YOU'LL BE IN THE CELLS SO FAST YOUR FEET WON'T TOUCH THE GROUND!

BUT "SMUDGER" SMITH, THE CHEERFUL COCKNEY SOLDIER, DID NOT HAVE LONG TO WAIT TO LEAVE THE CAMP... FOR WITH THE NEXT DAY'S PERFECT DAWN THE UNIT WAS ORDERED TO THE AIRFIELD...
WE TAKE OFF IN TWENTY MINUTES, EH, YANK... THAT IS, OF COURSE, IF YOU CAN GET THIS FLYING SCRAPHEAP OFF THE GROUND!
LISTEN, LIMEY... IF I CAN'T, YOU GUYS WILL JUST HAVE TO GET OUT AND PUSH!
LUCKY DUCK

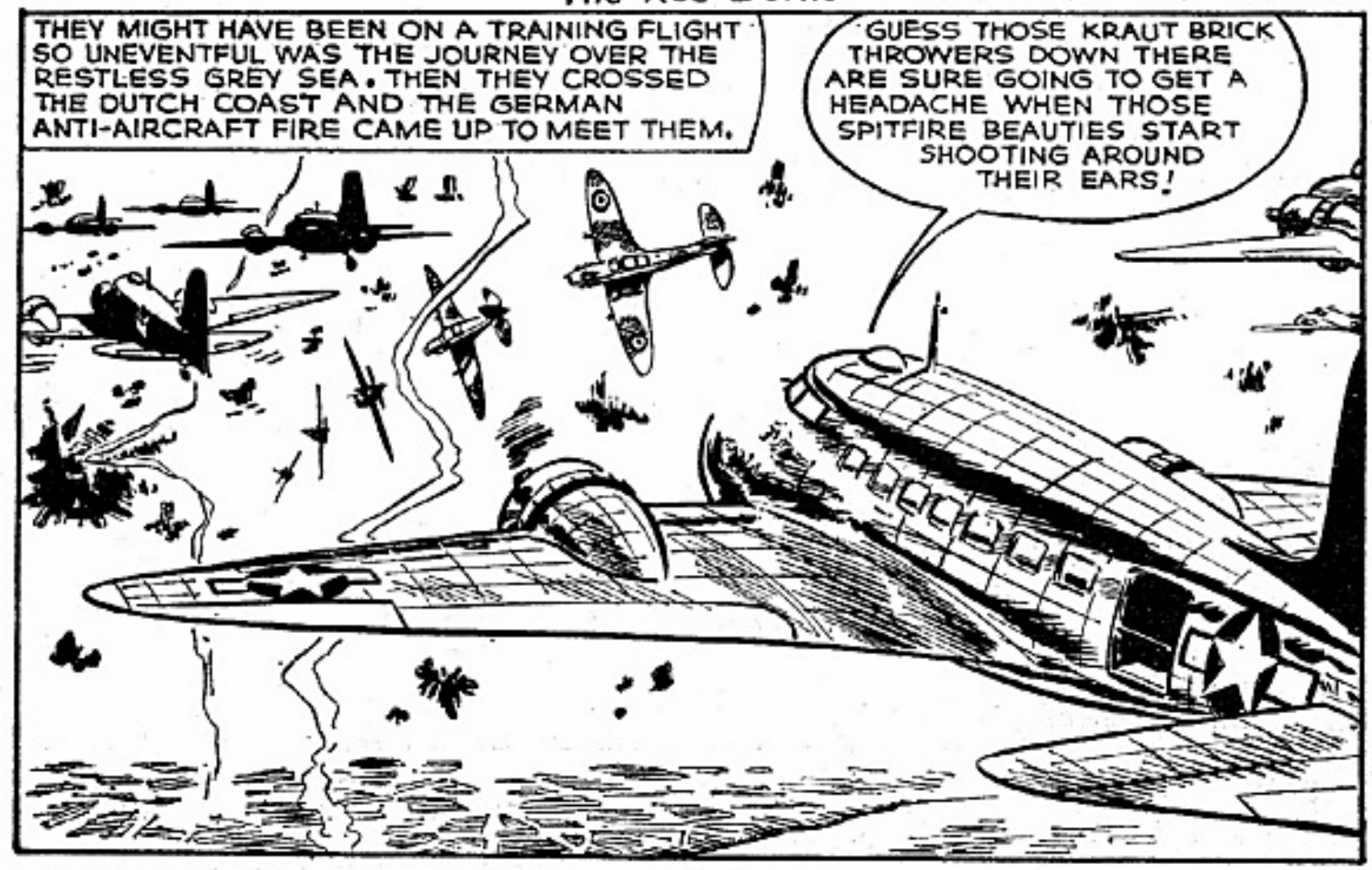
Chapter 3. AIR ARMADA

...ANOTHER DARKENED THE SKY NORTH OF THE BOMB-RAVAGED CITY OF LONDON...

IN THE TIGHTLY-PACKED PLANE OF THE SPECIAL ASSAULT SECTION SPIRITS RAN HIGH...AND IN EVERY MAN'S EYES FLICKERED THE BRIGHT FLAME OF EAGERNESS FOR THE TASK AHEAD...

WATCH YOUR SHOVING, TOSH...ANOTHER GOOD PUSH FROM YOU AND I'LL BE DOING A SOLO JUMP... RIGHT INTO THE FLIPPIN' CHANNEL!

OKAY... BUT DON'T ASK ME FOR A PUSH LATER ON... WHEN YOU'RE TREMBLING IN THE DOOR!


THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN ON A TRAINING FLIGHT SO UNEVENTFUL WAS THE JOURNEY OVER THE RESTLESS GREY SEA. THEN THEY CROSSED THE DUTCH COAST AND THE GERMAN ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE CAME UP TO MEET THEM.
GUESS THOSE KRAUT BRICK THROWERS DOWN THERE ARE SURE GOING TO GET A HEADACHE WHEN THOSE SPITFIRE BEAUTIES START SHOOTING AROUND THEIR EARS!

IN A RELENTLESS FLOOD THE HUGE CONVOYS OF PLANES DRONED ON TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVE... THE BRIDGES! SOON, FAR AHEAD OF DICK NORTON'S PLANE, THE LEADERS COULD BE SEEN CIRCLING OVER ARNHEM...
THEN SUDDENLY... WHOOMP!
LUCKY DUCK
...DISASTER STRUCK!

THE STURDY DAKOTA SHUDDERED FROM TIP TO TAIL AS THE EXPLOSIVE BLAST HAMMERED AT HER... STEEL SPLINTERS SLICED SAVAGELY INTO THE WING...

STARBOARD ENGINE'S PACKED UP AND THAT WING LOOKS LIKE A SIEVE! BROTHER, WHAT A MESS!

ONE ENGINE WON'T KEEP THIS CRATE FLYING WITH THOSE BOYS ABOARD. EITHER THEY HIT THE SILK NOW...OR WE TAKE A NOSE DIVE... STRAIGHT DOWN!

THERE WAS NO OTHER CHOICE... AND THE RED DEVILS KNEW IT. IN SECONDS THEY WERE LINED UP AT THE DOOR... AND DICK NORTON LED THEM THROUGH INTO SPACE....

LIKE THE WIDENING RIPPLES ON A POND, THE CLUSTERED WHITE CANOPIES DRIFTED APART... AND DICK WATCHED THE DAMAGED DAKOTA TURN AND STAGGER BACK TOWARDS ENGLAND...
WITH A LOT OF LUCK AND NO MORE TROUBLE, HE'LL MAKE IT... BUT HE'S LEFT US A HECK OF A LONG WALK TO ARNHEM!

QUICKLY HE COUNTED THE PARACHUTES AROUND HIM... TWENTY FOUR, TWENTY FIVE... ALL THERE. THEN A HUNDRED FEET OFF THE GROUND, A VICIOUS WHINE SANG HOTLY PAST HIS CHEEK...
WE'RE SITTING DUCKS FOR TARGET PRACTICE NOW... BUT IN JUST TEN SECONDS YOU JERRIES ARE GOING TO GET ALL THE TROUBLE YOU'RE ASKING FOR!

DICK HIT THE GROUND HARD, ROLLED TO TAKE THE SHOCK, AND WRENCHED OUT OF HIS HARNESS...
IMPATIENCE WILL GET YOU NOWHERE, SQUAREHEADS!

A PARACHUTIST IS AT HIS MOST VULNERABLE WHILE IN THE AIR AND IN THE FIRST MOMENTS OF LANDING. THE GREY CLAD GERMANS RACED TO REAP THAT ADVANTAGE, BUT THEY HAD RECKONED WITHOUT DICK NORTON'S LIGHTNING SPEED...
ENGLISH LEAD... DELIVERED FREE AND FAST!

THE FIGHT WAS SHORT AND SAVAGE...AND DISASTROUS TO THE GERMANS...

SERGEANT REED...GET THAT SECOND TRUCK! I'LL GRAB THE FIRST ONE... *IT'S OUR BUS FOR ARNHEM!*

THEY WON'T KNOW WHAT HIT 'EM, SIR! *COME ON, CORPORAL!*

THE APPROACHING LORRY'S BRAKES SCREAMED AS IT CAME UP...*AND TWO GRENADES HURTLED THROUGH THE AIR TO MEET IT!*

AND THIS LITTLE LOT IS SMUDGER SMITH'S PARTY PIECE!

ITS FRONT WHEELS SHATTERED, THE CRAZILY CAREERING LORRY CHARGED OFF THE ROAD, SLAMMED INTO A DITCH AND TURNED OVER...
ROOM FOR ONE MORE ON TOP? EARLY MORNING SINGLE TICKET...TO 'AMMERSMITH BROADWAY VIA ARNHEM!
NICE WORK, SERGEANT! GET THE MAP OUT AND NAVIGATE TO OUR OBJECTIVE. I'LL PILOT... AND THIS IS A NON-STOP TRIP!

WITH THE ACCELERATOR FLAT ON THE FLOOR BOARDS, THE LORRY ROARED UP THE ROAD ...TYRES SCREAMING ON THE BENDS TAKEN AT TOP SPEED...MILES FLASHED UNDER THE HUMMING WHEELS...THEN...

A ROAD BLOCK! THAT'S WHERE THE LORRIES CAME FROM... AND WE WON'T BUST THROUGH THAT SET UP, SIR!

THAT'S WHAT THOSE JERRIES THINK, TOO...AND THEY'RE IN IN FOR A SURPRISE! TELL THE MEN TO HANG ON FOR THEIR LIVES!

ONLY AT THE LAST MOMENT DID THE GERMANS REALISE THAT THE LORRY WAS NOT SLOWING DOWN...BUT INCREASING SPEED! THUNDERSTRUCK, THEY COULD ONLY STARE SLACK-JAWED AS DICK DRAGGED THE WHEEL ROUND...

COR...WHY DID I LEAVE MY 'CHUTE BEHIND? SOMEBODY TELL ME WHEN TO OPEN ME PEEPERS!

AS THE LORRY LURCHED BACK ON TO THE ROAD, THE GERMANS CAME TO LIFE... **BUT, TOO LATE!**

SHOOT THE ACCURSED ENGLISH PIGS DOWN... *AAAGH!*

LEAVE 'EM SOMETHING TO REMEMBER THE RED DEVILS! *RAPID FIRE!*

THEN THE LORRY WAS GONE... AND DICK DISMISSED THE HAVOC STRUCK ROAD BLOCK FROM HIS MIND...

LET ME KNOW WHEN WE'RE HALF A MILE FROM THE CROSS-ROADS, SERGEANT. ACCORDING TO THE AIR PHOTOS I STUDIED, THERE'S A DARNED HEFTY JERRY BLOCKHOUSE OVERLOOKING IT FROM THE EAST... AND I DON'T WANT TO RUN SMACK INTO ITS FIELD OF FIRE!

RIGHT, SIR. ABOUT TWENTY MILES TO GO!

WH-86186

TOUGH AS THEY WERE, THE PARACHUTISTS GRINNED WITH RELIEF TWENTY NIGHTMARE MINUTES LATER... AS, FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE HURTLING LORRY SLOWED ITS BREAKNECK SPEED...
I'D RATHER DO A DOZEN JUMPS THAN FIVE SECONDS MORE OF THAT GRAND PRIX STUFF!
CROSS-ROADS THREE HUNDRED YARDS BEYOND THIS BEND, SIR!
GOOD... WE'LL DITCH THIS MOBILE JUNK YARD HERE AND THEN WE'LL MOVE ON FOOT WIDE AROUND THE FLANK OF THE BLOCKHOUSE AND COME UP BEHIND IT! SURPRISE IS THE ONE ADVANTAGE WE'VE GOT!

THE GERMAN BLOCKHOUSE WAS BADLY NAMED... FOR IT WAS MORE LIKE A FORTRESS, BUILT ON THE ONLY HILL IN THE AREA. ITS GARRISON WAS SURE AND CONFIDENT BEHIND ITS STEEL AND CONCRETE STRENGTH...
MORE ENEMY PLANES THAN I HAVE EVER SEEN... AND GLIDERS, TOO! THEY MUST BE CARRYING TEN THOUSAND MEN!
ALREADY OUR WIRELESS REPORTS PARACHUTISTS LANDING NEAR ARNHEM! THAT WILL BE A BATTLE WE ARE WELL OUT OF, FRITZ! SOON THE CROSS-ROADS WILL BE FLOODED WITH OUR RE-INFORCEMENTS RUSHING TO ATTACK THOSE FIGHTING FIENDS!

SURE OF THEIR OWN SAFETY, THE SENTRIES STILL WATCHED THE FLEET OF PLANES PASSING . . . THEN SUDDENLY, IT HAPPENED . . .
GRAAAH!
UUUUH!

GRINNING FEROCIOUSLY, SMUDGER SMITH WAS FIRST THROUGH THE DOOR . . .
ACHTUNG! WE ARE ATTACKED!
FREEZE! THE FIRST DOZEY CLOWN WHO GETS UNFRIENDLY IDEAS COLLECTS A MAGAZINE FULL OF LEAD!

THE BLACK MENACING MUZZLE OF SMUDGER'S BREN GUN SWEPT THE ROOM... AND THE GERMANS FROZE... ALL EXCEPT THE BULL-NECKED SERGEANT.

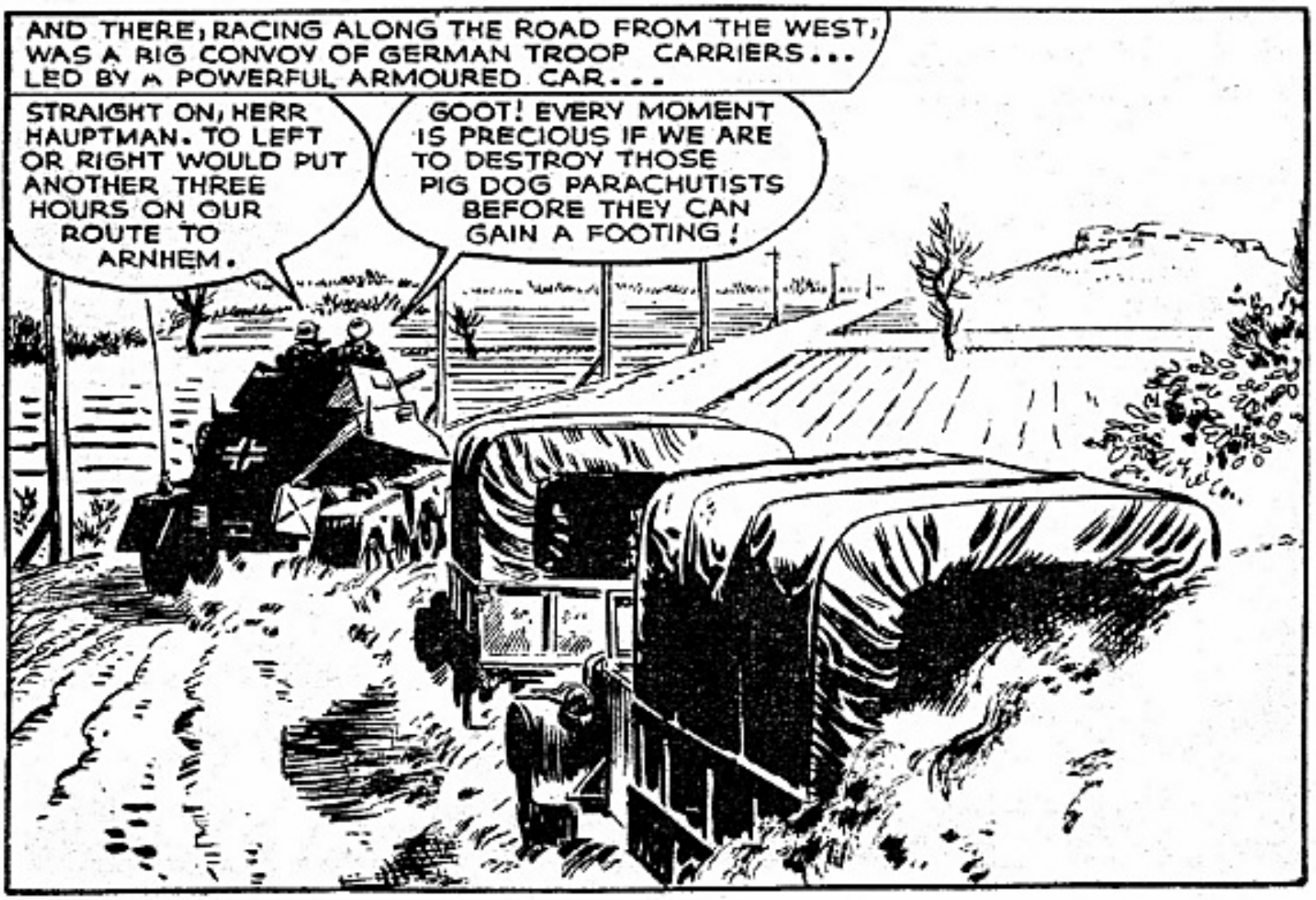
TRY THAT AGAIN, TOSH, AND YOU'LL GET TIRED OF BREATHING!

DICK'S PLAN HAD WORKED BRILLIANTLY... HE HAD CAPTURED THE FORTIFIED POST WITHOUT A CASUALTY!

CORPORAL SMITH... TAKE THE PRISONERS BACK DOWN THE HILL THE WAY WE CAME. THEN TURN 'EM LOOSE... *WITHOUT THEIR BELTS AND BOOTS!*

GET THOSE MACHINE GUNS READY FOR ACTION. SIGHTS ON THE CROSS-ROADS AND STAND BY... WE WON'T HAVE LONG TO WAIT!

EVERY MAN WAS TENSE AND SILENT BEHIND A WEAPON WHEN SMUDGER RETURNED . . .
YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THOSE JERRIES . . . HOLDING THEIR TROUSERS UP AND TRYING TO RUN IN BARE FEET!
CUT THE CACKLE, CORPORAL, AND GET THAT DOOR SHUT . . . AT THE DOUBLE!
HERE COMES THE FIRST JERRY COLUMN TRYING TO GET TO ARNHEM!


AND THERE, RACING ALONG THE ROAD FROM THE WEST, WAS A BIG CONVOY OF GERMAN TROOP CARRIERS . . . LED BY A POWERFUL ARMOURED CAR . . .
STRAIGHT ON, HERR HAUPTMAN. TO LEFT OR RIGHT WOULD PUT ANOTHER THREE HOURS ON OUR ROUTE TO ARNHEM.
GOOT! EVERY MOMENT IS PRECIOUS IF WE ARE TO DESTROY THOSE PIG DOG PARACHUTISTS BEFORE THEY CAN GAIN A FOOTING!

SILENTLY THE GRIM, GREY BLOCKHOUSE SEEMED TO FROWN DOWN ON THE SPEEDING LORRIES AS THEY NEARED THE CROSS-ROADS. SUDDENLY THE SILENCE WAS GONE... IN ITS PLACE CAME ROARING VIOLENCE...

TONGUES OF FLAME SPAT SAVAGELY FROM THE BLOCKHOUSE SLITS AS THE MACHINE GUNS CHATTERED. IN TEN TERRIBLE SECONDS, STREAMS OF SEARING LEAD TURNED THE CONVOY INTO A SHAMBLES OF WRECKED VEHICLES AND PANIC-STRICKEN MEN...
SCHNELL! SCHNELL! FASTER, IDIOTS... WE HAVE GOT TO STOP THOSE MACHINE GUNS!
BUT...BUT THEY ARE OUR OWN MEN... OR HAVE THOSE RED DEVIL FIGHTERS REACHED THIS AREA ALREADY?

CRUMP! A SIX-POUNDER SHELL SPLATTERED HARMLESSLY AGAINST THE CONCRETE CASING WHICH SHIELDED THE JUBILANT AIRBORNE TROOPS...

THEY WON'T EVEN DENT THE PLACE WITH THAT PEA-SHOOTER, SIR...BUT SHALL I GIVE 'EM A TASTE OF THIS?

NOT WORTH THE AMMUNITION, SERGEANT...AND WE'LL BE NEEDING ALL WE'VE GOT WHEN THEY BRING UP THEIR TANKS...THEN WE'LL FIND OUT JUST HOW TOUGH THIS FORTRESS IS!

A WRY SMILE TWISTED DICK'S FIRM LIPS...

WE'VE GOT STACKS OF FOOD AND AMMO... AND PLENTY OF TIME TO USE THEM BOTH! THE ALLIED ARMY SPEARHEAD SHOULD LINK UP WITH THE AIRBORNE DIVISION AT ARNHEM IN THREE DAYS...AND WE'RE STAYING HERE UNTIL IT DOES! AND THE MORE JERRIES WE TIE UP HERE, THE LESS CAN CRACK DOWN ON THE LADS AT ARNHEM!

DOWN ON THE ROAD THE GERMANS WERE STRAGGLING AWAY IN RETREAT FROM THE CHAOS...
DONNER UND BLITZEN! EVEN THE OTHER ROADS ARE COVERED BY THOSE MACHINE GUNS. WE CANNOT GO ON IN THE VEHICLES, HERR COLONEL! THERE IS ONLY ONE ANSWER ...A FRONTAL ASSAULT ON THE BLOCKHOUSE TO DESTROY IT!
DUMKOPF! THE WHOLE FORCE WOULD BE MOWN DOWN BEFORE THEY GOT HALFWAY. NO... WE STAY HERE TO WAIT FOR OUR TANKS WHICH ARE COMING!

THE DAY WORE ON, WITH NO MOVEMENT BY THE GERMAN SOLDIERS...UNTIL THE DUSK OF EVENING A HEAVY METALLIC RUMBLING GREW FROM THE WEST...AND REACHED THE EARS OF THE BESIEGED RED DEVILS...
HERE THEY COME, SIR... JERRY'S CLANKING TIN LIZZIES... THE TANKS.
QUIET! SOMETHING'S COMING THROUGH ON THE WIRELESS ...IT'S ONE OF OUR UNIT HEADQUARTERS AT ARNHEM!

THE RADIO OPERATOR'S YOUNG FACE LENGTHENED AS HE LISTENED...
THEY CAN'T RECEIVE ME... BUT I CAN HEAR THE REPORTS COMING IN. OUR BOYS HAVE REACHED THE BRIDGE BUT THEY CAN'T CAPTURE IT AS THE JERRIES HAVE GOT IT UNDER VERY HEAVY FIRE!
KEEP LISTENING... WE'LL SEE WHAT THESE NEW ARRIVALS ARE UP TO!

THE TANKS PROVED TO BE FOUR "TIGERS" AND SOON THEIR LONG BARRELLED GUNS WERE PIN-POINTING THE BLOCKHOUSE. THEN THE BARRAGE STARTED...
...AND FOR A SPLIT SECOND ANGRY BLOSSOMS OF VIVID ORANGE FLAME GREW ON THE MASSIVE STONE WALLS...

MEANWHILE TWENTY MILES TO THE EAST A GREAT BATTLE WAS BEGINNING AT ARNHEM. IT HAD BEEN PLANNED TO LAST FOR THREE DAYS... UNTIL THE ALLIED LAND ARMIES BROKE THROUGH AND JOINED THE PARACHUTE TROOPS. BUT THAT BREAK THROUGH DID NOT COME IN THE TIME ALLOWED... OR IN DOUBLE THAT TIME, OR TREBLE. IN FACT, FOR TEN DAYS OF FANTASTICALLY COURAGEOUS FIGHTING AGAINST VASTLY GREATER ENEMY NUMBERS, THE AIRBORNE DIVISION HELD OUT... WAITING FOR THE LINK UP WHICH NEVER CAME!

AND WHAT OF DICK NORTON AND HIS MEN DURING THOSE HISTORY MAKING DAYS? *INCREDIBLY, THEY TOO, HELD OUT!* TRUE, GERMAN UNITS HEADING FOR ARNHEM NOW USED A ROUTE TO THE NORTH... BUT A LARGE FORCE STILL HAD TO BESIEGE THE BLOCKHOUSE...

WELL, SIR, THIS IS THE LAST OF THE FOOD... RECKON THERE'S ENOUGH FOR ONE GOOD MEAL. THEN WE GO HUNGRY!

TEN DAYS AND WE'RE STILL HERE... AND FIGHTING! IT'S A WONDER THIS PLACE IS STILL STANDING... BUT IT CAN'T TAKE MUCH MORE POUNDING BEFORE IT COMES IN ON TOP OF US!

IN THE CORNER, THE WIRELESS OPERATOR GLARED DISGUSTEDLY AT THE SMALL WIRELESS SET HE HAD PARACHUTED WITH.

USELESS DARNED THING! HAVEN'T EVEN HAD A PEEP OUT OF IT SINCE WE LANDED ...AND I CAN ONLY RECEIVE ON THE JERRY SET!

SUDDENLY HIS EYES WIDENED... HIS HANDS LEAPED TO COVER HIS EARPHONES AS HE LISTENED INTENTLY...

IT'S HEADQUARTERS... VERY FAINT! THEY'RE CALLING ALL UNITS STILL IN CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY... *JUMPING JEHOSOPHAT! THAT WAS THE CODE WORD FOR WITHDRAWAL ... WHAT'S LEFT OF THE DIVISION MUST BE PULLING OUT OF ARNHEM!*

ALL EYES CENTRED ON DICK, SILENTLY QUESTIONING . . .
THEN OUR TASK IS FINISHED . . . WE'RE FREE TO GET OUT NOW . . . IF WE CAN!
BUT HOW, SIR? WE'RE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED!
BUT IF SOME OF THOSE JERRIES WERE DRAWN AWAY WITH A DIVERSION? I'VE GOT THE GLIMMERINGS OF AN IDEA . . . LISTEN . . .

THE GERMANS SHELLED THE BLOCKHOUSE AGAIN AS DUSK FELL . . . UNTIL DARKNESS BLOTTED OUT THE DAY'S SHAPES. THEN, JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT . . .
WHO THE . . . ? SERGEANT REED! YOUR ORDERS WERE TO LEAD THE MEN OUT WHEN I MADE THE DIVERSIONARY ATTACK! GET BACK TO IT!
SORRY, SIR . . . BUT I'M DISOBEYING ORDERS! CORPORAL SMITH IS TAKING THE MEN ON THEIR BREAKOUT . . . I'M GOING WITH YOU! BETWEEN US WE'LL MAKE ENOUGH NOISE FOR A BATTALION!

RELUCTANTLY THE YOUNG OFFICER HAD TO ADMIT THE SERGEANT WAS RIGHT. HE NODDED AND NOISELESSLY LED THE WAY DOWN THE HILL. MINUTES SLID BY . . . AND THEN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT WAS SHATTERED WITH MAN-MADE FURY . . .

GRENADES EXPLODED SHATTERINGLY IN THE MAIN GERMAN POSITION... AND SLIVERS OF STEEL SLICED VICIOUSLY THROUGH THE FLAME-LIT NIGHT.
EMERGENCY! REPORT FULL SCALE ENEMY ASSAULT ON HEADQUARTERS! ORDER ALL UNITS TO COUNTER ATTACK AT ONCE!

FOR TEN FLEETING MINUTES, DICK AND BILL REED KEPT UP THEIR DEATH-DEFYING ATTACK...DODGING THROUGH THE DARKNESS LIKE GHOSTS...AND POURING BULLETS AND HIGH EXPLOSIVE INTO THE GERMAN HEADQUARTERS. THEN, AT LAST...
STAND WHERE YOU ARE! DROP YOUR WEAPONS OR WE SHOOT!
THEY'VE GOT US, SERGEANT... DO AS HE SAYS! BUT FROM THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THEY'VE COME, THERE MUST BE A HECK OF A BIG HOLE IN THE RING AROUND THE BLOCKHOUSE!

CLOSELY GUARDED, THE PRISONERS WERE MARCHED BEFORE THE GERMAN COMMANDER, WHO ALMOST BURST WITH RAGE WHEN HE SAW HOW MANY MEN HAD WROUGHT SUCH CONFUSION.
TWO OF YOU! YET YOU ATTACKED US AS IF THERE WERE A HUNDRED! ACH... I UNDERSTAND! YOU ARE THE LEADERS TRYING TO BLAST YOUR WAY OUT OF OUR TRAP! NOW YOUR MEN UP THERE HAVE NO COMMANDER...IN THE MORNING WE WILL ATTACK, AND THEY WILL GIVE IN QUICKLY!
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BY THE FIRST FAINT LIGHT OF DAWN, THE WHOLE GERMAN FORCE SWEPT UP THE HILL IN AN ALL-OUT ATTACK ON THE BLOCKHOUSE... AND NOT A SHOT MET THEM!
LOOK AT THEM, SIR...DEAD PUZZLED BECAUSE THEY CAN'T FIND A THING. SEEMS THE BIRDMEN HAVE FLOWN!
HEAR THAT RUMBLING FROM THE SOUTH? HEAVY GUNS... IT MUST BE OUR MAIN ARMY ADVANCING, AND THEY CAN'T BE MORE THAN TWENTY MILES AWAY! WITH ANY LUCK, CORPORAL SMITH AND THE LADS MUST BE DARNED NEARLY THERE BY NOW!
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Chapter 4. FINAL ASSAULT

EVENTS MOVED SWIFTLY AFTER THAT. THE GERMANS BEGAN A FULL RETREAT EASTWARDS WHICH, THREE DAYS LATER, TOOK THEM TWENTY MILES BEYOND THE RHINE INTO GERMANY. THERE DICK NORTON AND BILL REED WERE TAKEN TO LUDINGHAUSEN PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMP.

BRITISH SCUM... INTO THE RAT TRAP WHERE YOU BELONG.

WELCOME TO THE 'APPY 'OME, CHUM... BE IT EVER SO 'UMBLE! JUST IN TIME TO ENJOY THE WINTER SPORTS... WHICH MAINLY CONSISTS OF TRYING TO KEEP FROM FREEZING NOW THE SNOW IS COMING!

ALTHOUGH LUDINGHAUSEN WAS NOT A LARGE PRISONER-OF-WAR CAMP IT WAS WELL GUARDED. FOR SEVERAL DAYS DICK STUDIED THE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS... AND THEN REPORTED BEFORE THE PRISONERS' ESCAPE COMMITTEE...

MY PLAN OF ESCAPE IS SIMPLE AND EASY, SIR... ALL I WANT IS YOUR OKAY TO GO AHEAD WITH IT.

SORRY, OLD LAD... IT'S NOT ON! WE'RE ALLOWING NO MORE ESCAPE BIDS THROUGH THE WINTER MONTHS. YOU MIGHT GET OUT... BUT YOU'D DIE OF EXHAUSTION AND COLD IN THE SNOW!

BESIDES, DICK... MONTY'S ARMY WILL BE HAVING A CRACK AT CROSSING THE RHINE SOON AND WE'LL BE HERE WAITING FOR 'EM!

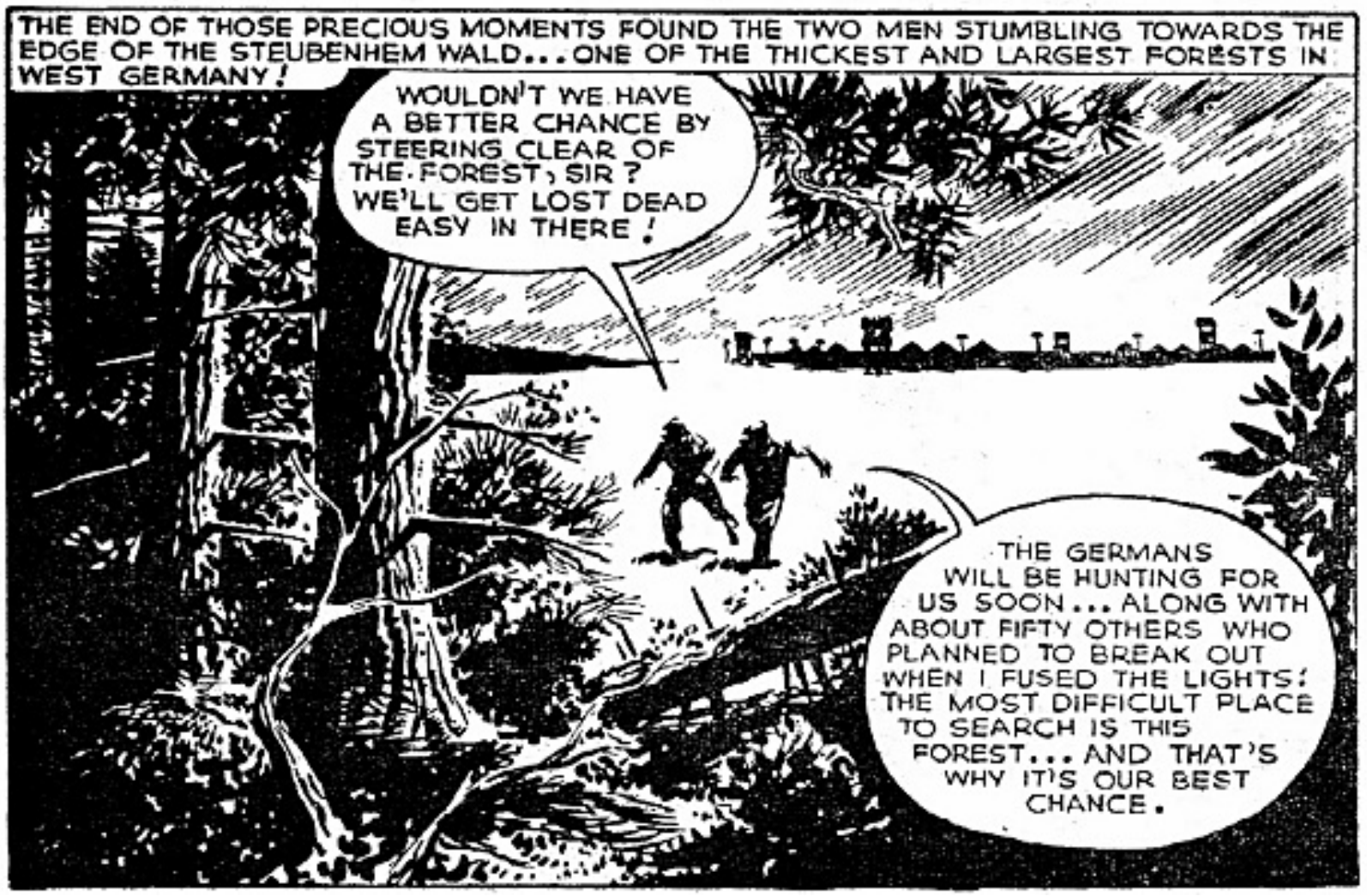
SO DICK WAS FORCED TO WAIT THROUGH THE SHORT GLOOMY DAYS OF WORSENING WINTER WEATHER WHICH FOLLOWED. SNOW AND ICE COVERED THE CAMP ...AND THERE WAS LITTLE WARMTH FOR THE PRISONERS. THE WEEKS BECAME MONTHS...AND STILL THE ALLIES COULD NOT CROSS THE RHINE. RUMOURS WERE RIFE THAT THE GERMANS WERE DEFENDING THE LAST BARRIER TO THEIR FATHERLAND WITH INCREDIBLE FURY. CHRISTMAS CAME AND WENT...

AT NIGHT THE BARBED WIRE BARRIER AROUND THE CAMP WAS BRILLIANTLY LIT BY POWERFUL FLOOD LIGHTS... AND STRANGELY ENOUGH THEY FORMED THE KEY TO DICK'S SCHEME.
I LEARNED TO THROW A KNIFE IN BURMA... NOW WE'LL SEE IF I'VE FORGOTTEN HOW!
IT'S ONLY AN ISSUE EATING KNIFE... BUT IT'S AS SHARP AS I COULD HONE IT, SIR!

THE PROBING SEARCHLIGHT SWEPT ON ...AND A SILENT LITHE FIGURE DRIFTED TOWARDS THE WIRE. AN ARM DREW BACK... THERE WAS A FLASH OF FLYING STEEL...
...AND THEN FOR ONE SPLIT-SECOND AN EYE-SEARING BLUE FLASH LIT THE HEAVENS... THEN UTTER DARKNESS!

GUTTURAL GERMAN SHOUTS ECHOED URGENTLY THROUGH THE VELVET BLACKNESS... THE POWER FUSES HAD BLOWN... THE SEARCHLIGHTS TOO WERE USELESS. IT WOULD TAKE MINUTES TO GET EMERGENCY LIGHTS WORKING...
THE JERRIES NEVER MEANT THEIR BENCHES FOR THIS SORT OF LARK, SIR!
NOW THEY'LL KNOW BETTER! GO BACK AND GET READY FOR THE RUN UP!

A THICK WHITE CHALK LINE SHONE ALONG THE MIDDLE OF THE WOODEN SEATS TO GUIDE THE MEN AS THEY RACED THROUGH THE DARKNESS *STRAIGHT UP THE SLOPING BENCHES..*
TEN SECONDS MORE ...THAT'S ALL WE WANT! AFTER THAT THE JERRIES WILL NEVER TAKE US AGAIN...*ALIVE!*


THE END OF THOSE PRECIOUS MOMENTS FOUND THE TWO MEN STUMBLING TOWARDS THE EDGE OF THE STEUBENHEM WALD...ONE OF THE THICKEST AND LARGEST FORESTS IN WEST GERMANY!
WOULDN'T WE HAVE A BETTER CHANCE BY STEERING CLEAR OF THE FOREST, SIR? WE'LL GET LOST DEAD EASY IN THERE!
THE GERMANS WILL BE HUNTING FOR US SOON...ALONG WITH ABOUT FIFTY OTHERS WHO PLANNED TO BREAK OUT WHEN I FUSED THE LIGHTS! THE MOST DIFFICULT PLACE TO SEARCH IS THIS FOREST...AND THAT'S WHY IT'S OUR BEST CHANCE.

SOON THE EERIE DEPTHS OF THE BLACK FOREST SHROUDED THEM. IMMEDIATELY DICK TOOK THE LEAD AND UNERRINGLY FOUND A WESTWARD PATH.
CAN YOU EASE UP A BIT, SIR? I CAN'T MATCH YOUR PACE.
ALL RIGHT, SERGEANT I'LL SLOW DOWN A LITTLE, BUT THERE'S ABOUT FIFTEEN MORE MILES OF THIS...AND WE MUST DO IT BY DAYBREAK TO ENSURE DODGING THE SEARCH PARTIES.

THAT MARCH SOON BECAME A LIVING NIGHTMARE TO BILL REED. HE GAVE UP TRYING TO FOCUS HIS RED-RIMMED EYES IN THE DARK AND JUST FOLLOWED DICK'S ARROW STRAIGHT STEPS. THEN MUSCLE-RACKING MILES PASSED WITH THE HOURS UNTIL...
WE'VE REACHED THE OTHER SIDE...AND BY DAYBREAK! HOW THE HECK DID YOU DO IT, SIR?
IT WAS WORSE THAN THIS IN BURMA, SERGEANT...OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN? IN THOSE MONTHS IN THE JUNGLE I FOUND A SENSE OF DIRECTION I COULD TRUST WITH MY EYES SHUT!

OTHER MEMORIES FLOWED BEFORE BILL REED'S EYES AS THEY REACHED THE FOREST'S EDGE. MEMORIES OF A YOUNGER BROTHER...AND A BATTLE ON A BURMESE HILL WHICH LEFT ONLY ONE SURVIVOR... DICK NORTON....
I REMEMBER IT, SIR...AND MY BROTHER! HE WAS YOUR PLATOON CORPORAL IN THAT LAST FIGHT AGAINST THE JAPS. HE DIED THERE... AND YOU LIVED! WHY, SIR? WHY?
YOUR BROTHER? WHY IN HEAVEN'S NAME DIDN'T YOU TELL ME BEFORE? IF ONLY I'D KNOWN...
...THEN DICK'S VOICE DIED AS HE SAW THE ACCUSATION BURNING IN BILL REED'S UNFLINCHING GAZE!

SO YOU THINK I SHOULD HAVE DIED WITH MY MEN...OR BROUGHT THEM ALL BACK ALIVE! WELL, IT WAS A LONG TIME BEFORE I COULD REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT HILL, BUT GRADUALLY IT ALL CAME BACK... AND NOW YOU'LL KNOW!

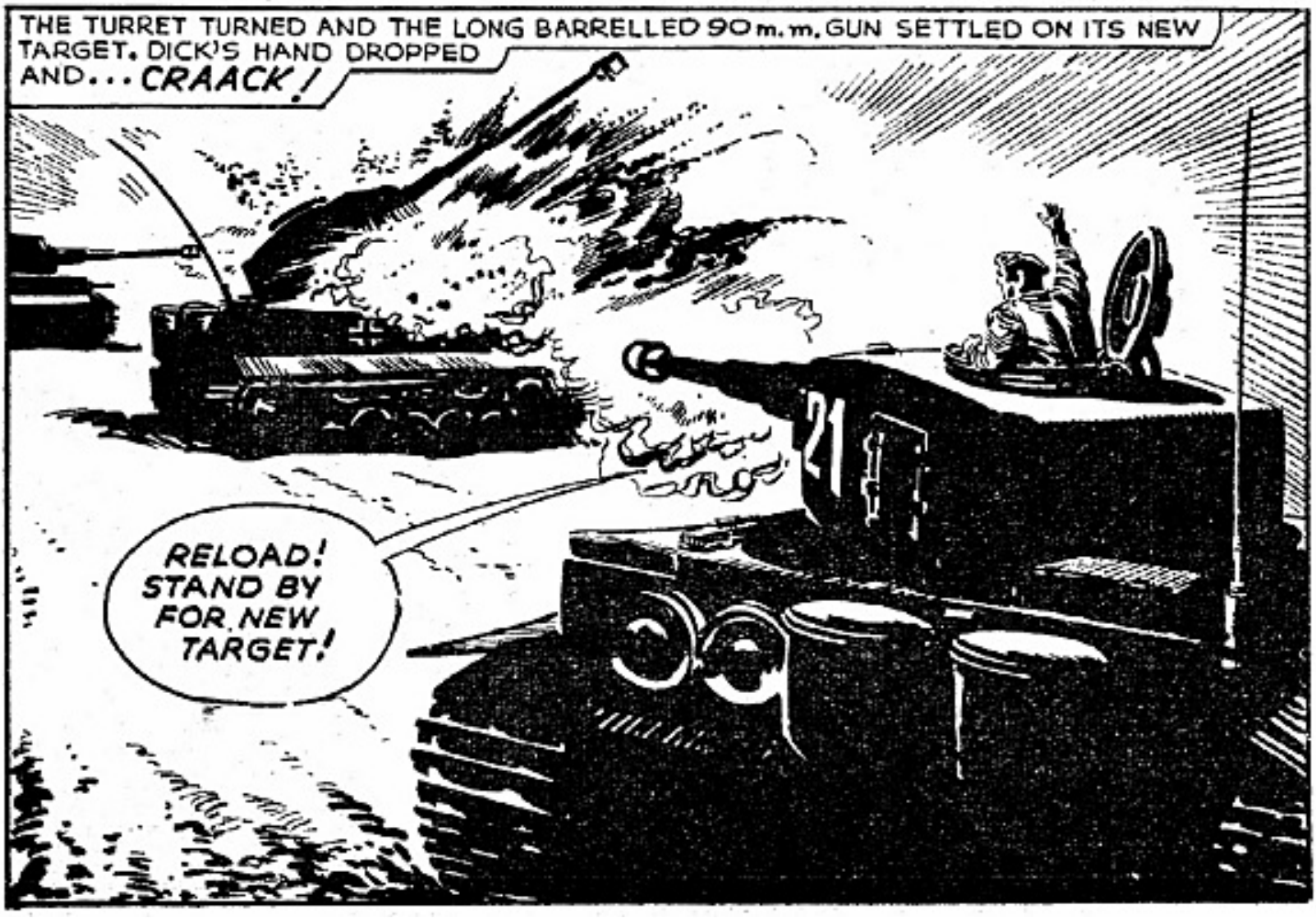
SLOWLY AND TIGHT VOICED, DICK BEGAN TO RELIVE THE FURY OF THAT ILL-FATED DAY...THROUGH THE NEVER ENDING ENEMY ATTACKS... THE HOURS OF MERCILESS MORTARING...THE BROKEN WIRELESS MESSAGE AND THEN THE FINAL CRUSHING ONSLAUGHT BY THE JAPS. BILL REED HEARD IT ALL... AND KNEW HE HAD FOUND THE ANSWER...
... IT WAS ONLY A MIRACLE THAT SAVED ME. YOUR BROTHER WAS A GALLANT SOLDIER AND HE WENT DOWN FIGHTING WITH HIS FACE TO THE ENEMY... LIKE A MAN! I'M PROUD TO HAVE FOUGHT BESIDE HIM!
YOU DOUBLED YOUR OWN DANGER GETTING ME OUT OF THE CAMP AND THROUGH THE FOREST... AND AFTER SEEING YOU IN ACTION, SIR, I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN YOU DIDN'T LEAVE THOSE MEN TO DIE!

THE BOND OF FRIENDSHIP SEALED IN A HANDCLASP NEEDED NO WORDS.TOGETHER THEY TURNED TOWARDS THE RHINE... AND BILL REED GASPED IN BREATH-TAKING AMAZEMENT...
BY GLORY... I'M DREAMING! LOOK, AIRBORNE TROOPS... AND THEY'RE DROPPING!
IT MUST BE THE ALLIED ASSAULT ACROSS THE RHINE, SERGEANT! THE DROPPING ZONE'S ABOUT A MILE AWAY... LET'S GO!

EXHAUSTION FORGOTTEN, THEY RACED OVER THE FIELDS TOWARDS THE DROPPING ZONE. ALREADY THE GERMAN DEFENCES WERE TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE...
GREAT GUNS... THOSE TANKS WILL MASSACRE THOSE BOYS AS THEY LAND!
BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO LET 'EM, SERGEANT! WHEN I GIVE THE WORD, GO LIKE BLAZES FOR THAT NEAREST TANK. READY...NOW!

THE TANK'S GUN FLAMED ANGRILY AND A SCREECHING HIGH EXPLOSIVE SHELL STREAKED ACROSS THE OPEN COUNTRY. THE TANK COMMANDER BARKED A CORRECTION... AND THEN A CHOPPING, IRON-HARD FIST ALMOST SLAMMED HIM OUT OF THE TURRET...
HAUL HIM DOWN, SERGEANT... AND GRAB HIS LUGER! THEN INTO THIS OVERGROWN BULLY BEEF TIN AND SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE THE GUNNER BEHAVE!

GRASPING THE GERMAN OFFICER'S PISTOL, BILL DROPPED INTO THE TANK. SEVERAL DULL THUDS FOLLOWED... THEN THE SERGEANT'S CHEERFUL VOICE FLOATED UP.
ONE SORE-HEADED JERRY GUN CREW AWAITING ORDERS, SIR!
RIGHT! TRAVERSE THE GUN LEFT... RIGHT ON TO OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR!


THE TURRET TURNED AND THE LONG BARRELLED 90 m.m. GUN SETTLED ON ITS NEW TARGET. DICK'S HAND DROPPED AND... CRAACK!
RELOAD! STAND BY FOR NEW TARGET!

SUDDENLY WARNED, THE THIRD TANK COMMANDER RE-ACTED SWIFTLY. HIS GUN SWUNG SMOOTHLY, SEEKING ITS NEW PREY... AND FIRED WITH DESPERATE HASTE!
THIS GAME'S FOR KEEPS, JERRY... NO SECOND CHANCES... FIRE!
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BILL REED HAD RELOADED WITH ARMOUR PIERCING SHOT... IT PUNCHED A HOLE IN THE ENEMY TANK STEEL AS IF IT WERE CHEESE... AND THEN IT MUST HAVE HIT A PETROL TANK...
LOOKS AS IF WE CAN RELAX NOW, SERGEANT... THE RED BERET BOYS ARE HERE!
MAYBE THEY'VE GOT TEA FOR A BREW UP, SIR!
WELL I'LL BE DARNED! WHERE THE HECK DID YOU TWO CHAPS COME FROM? WHERE'S YOUR UNIT?

WE'RE A COUPLE OF 'LEFT OVERS' FROM ARNHEM ... THOUGHT WE'D BETTER GIVE YOU A FRIENDLY WELCOME! WHICH OUTFIT IS ON THIS SHOW?

WE'RE SIXTH AIRBORNE DIVISION... AND YOU CERTAINLY HELPED US OUT! ***HEY, DID YOU SAY ARNHEM?***

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS DICK AND BILL REED WERE IN THE UNIT'S MAKESHIFT HEADQUARTERS. ALREADY MANY FIERCE BATTLES WERE RAGING NEARBY AS THE PARACHUTISTS FOUGHT TO TAKE THEIR HEAVILY DEFENDED OBJECTIVES.

... A FANTASTIC STORY, CAPTAIN NORTON... AND IT FOLLOWS ON FROM THE REPORT YOUR SECTION CORPORAL MADE WHEN YOUR MEN REACHED THE ALLIED LINES AFTER ARNHEM. NOW I SUPPOSE YOU WANT A GOOD REST.

WELL, WE'VE JUST HAD SIX MONTHS HOLIDAY IN A P.O.W. CAMP, MAJOR... HOW ABOUT LETTING US JOIN IN YOUR OUTFIT'S PARTY?

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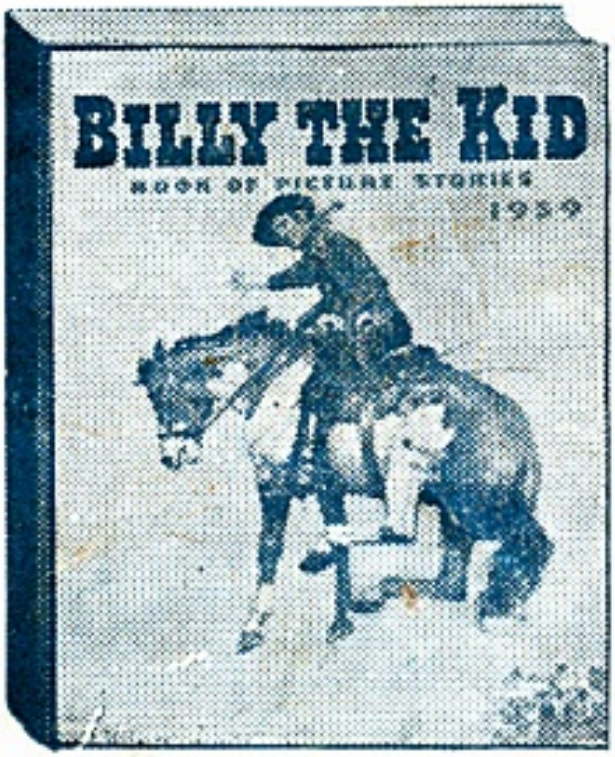

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